

TAKING MORE TRICKS WHEN PLAYING WITH A TRUMP SUIT

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BRIDGE LINGO

Doubleton → A holding of two cards in a suit.

Singleton → A holding of one card in a suit.

Void → An absence of any cards in a suit.

Entry → A card that can take a trick in a specific hand.

Ruffing → Playing a trump card on a trick when you can not follow suit.

Side Suit → A suit in declarer's hand other than the trump suit. For example, if diamonds are trump, then spades, hearts, and clubs are *side suits*.

Draw Trump → Playing the trump suit until each opponent is void in the suit.

BIDDING GUIDELINES

Recall the following game score point guideline:

• *Point Guideline:*

It usually takes at least 26 combined high card points to make a game contract in no trump or a major suit.

It usually takes at least 28 high card points to make a game contract in a minor suit.

But experience shows that if a partnership declares a suit contract:

- the hand with the longer trump suit is stronger than indicated by a simple count of high card points.

*To measure the total strength of the **long trump suit hand**, add one **long suit point** for a five card trump suit, add two long suit points for a six card trump suit, and so on.*

- the hand with the shorter trump suit that also has a short side suit is stronger than indicated by a simple count of high card points.

*To measure the total strength of the **short trump suit hand** that has at least three trump, add one **short suit point** for a side suit doubleton, three short suit points for side suit singleton and five short suit points for a side suit void.*

UPDATED POINT COUNT GUIDELINES

If we define the term *bidding points* to mean the sum of the total high card points (HCP) plus any long suit points (LSP) plus any short suit points (SSP), then we can update the point guidelines to the following:

- *No Trump Point Guideline:*

It usually takes at least 25 combined **high card points** to make a no trump game contract.

- *Trump Suit Point Guideline:*

It usually takes at least 26 combined **bidding points** to make a major suit game contract.

It usually takes at least 28 combined **bidding points** to make a minor suit game contract.

EXAMPLE — 28 BIDDING POINTS		EXAMPLE — 27 BIDDING POINTS	
WEST - DUMMY	EAST - DECLARER	WEST - DECLARER	EAST - DUMMY
♠ Q 8 5 3	♠ A K 7	♠ A J T 8 6	♠ Q 7 5
♥ T 8 5 4	♥ K Q 3	♥ Q 7 4	♥ A K 9 6
♦ J 7 4 2	♦ A K Q 8 3	♦ 7 5 3	♦ T 8
♣ 4	♣ T 9	♣ A K	♣ Q 8 5 7

Left Example: If diamonds are trump:

- Declarer has 22 bidding points → 21 HCP plus 1 LSP for the five card diamond suit.
- Dummy has 6 bidding points → 3 HCP plus 3 SSP for the singleton club.

The total for the combined hands is 28 (22 plus 6) bidding points, enough to suggest a diamond game contract.

Right Example: If spades are trump:

- Declarer has 15 bidding points → 14 HCP plus 1 LSP for the five card spade suit.
- Dummy has 12 bidding points → 11 HCP plus 1 SSP for the doubleton diamond.

The total for the combined hands is 27 (15 plus 12) bidding points, enough to suggest a spade game contract.

CONFIRMING A TRUMP SUIT CONTRACT

The basic strategy to confirm and, if necessary, adjust a suit contract target suggested by the *suit guideline* and *trump suit point guideline* is similar to the strategy used to confirm and adjust a no trump contract target. But because of the power of the trump suit, there are important differences in the way a trump suit contract is confirmed and adjusted. Declarer should:

1. Count losers in one hand, called the *master hand*.
 - ✓ Include losses needed to promote high cards.
2. Look for ways to eliminate losers by:
 - ✓ Trumping losers from the master hand using trump from the other hand.
 - ✓ Finessing an opponent's high card.
 - ✓ Discarding losers from the master hand on extra winners in the other hand.
 - Consider developing a long suit in the other hand to create winners.

The biggest difference is in the first step. Start the process by counting losers in one hand instead of counting sure winners in the combined hands. There are two main reasons for for this difference:

- **You can only count sure winners in the trump suit.**
Unless you draw trump immediately, there is a danger that opponents might trump one or more of the sure winners in your side suits.
- **You might be able to trump side suit losers.**
If you plan to ruff one or more of your side suit losers, you may not be able to draw trump immediately.

The remainder of this document explains the process in detail.

DECLARER PLAY

COUNTING LOSERS

The first step to confirm and adjust a suit contract is to count the losers in each suit and add up the counts to get the total number of losers. **Losers should be counted in one hand**, the hand with the longest and strongest trump suit. This hand is called the *master hand* and the other hand is called the *support hand*. A loser is any card **in the master hand** that is not a sure winner and that can not be covered by a high card in the support hand.

There are no losers in the master hand for any of the following combinations:

NO LOSERS
Q 6 SUPPORT HAND MASTER HAND A K 2

NO LOSERS
A Q SUPPORT HAND MASTER HAND K 7 3

NO LOSERS
7 6 4 2 SUPPORT HAND MASTER HAND A K

In the left example, the Two in the master hand is covered by the Queen in the support hand. In the middle example, the seven and three in the master hand are covered by the Ace and Queen in the support hand because the master hand holds the King.

In the following examples, the master hand has one loser that can not be covered by honors in the support hand:

1 LOSER
K 7 6 SUPPORT HAND MASTER HAND A 8 4

1 LOSER
7 6 SUPPORT HAND MASTER HAND A K 4

1 LOSER
9 5 3 2 SUPPORT HAND MASTER HAND 7

You might be able to ruff the four in the middle example, but it must be counted as a loser in the original count because you may have a better use for the trump in the support hand.

UNSUPPORTED HIGH CARDS

If you have only one unsupported high card you must count it as a loser. For example:

3 LOSERS (Possible Finesse)
9 4 SUPPORT HAND MASTER HAND K 3 2

2 LOSERS (Possible Finesse)
K 5 4 SUPPORT HAND MASTER HAND 7 2

3 LOSERS (Unlikely Finesse)
8 7 3 SUPPORT HAND MASTER HAND Q 6 4

In all of these examples, you might be able to finesse the honor and take a trick. But the decision to risk the finesse can not be made until you have a count of your losers and have analyzed various alternatives to eliminate them.

SOLID SEQUENCES

When you have a **solid sequence in the combined hands**, you can promote cards in the sequence into winners but you must lose tricks to do it. Count the losers in the master hand as the number of missing cards higher than the sequence. For example:

1 LOSER (Missing A)	2 LOSERS (Missing AK)	3 LOSERS (Missing AKQ)
K Q J SUPPORT HAND MASTER HAND 7 5 3	J 7 2 SUPPORT HAND MASTER HAND Q T 6	9 8 SUPPORT HAND MASTER HAND J T 7 2

In the example on the right, you might be able to ruff one of the losers using trump in the support hand. But you can not make that assumption when you are making your count.

BROKEN SEQUENCES

Count the losers in a broken sequence in the same way that you count the losers in a solid sequence. For example:

1 LOSER (Missing K)	2 LOSERS (Missing AQ)	2 LOSERS (Missing KJ)
8 4 2 SUPPORT HAND MASTER HAND A Q J	7 6 4 SUPPORT HAND MASTER HAND K J T	7 5 2 SUPPORT HAND MASTER HAND A Q T

You can try a finesse in all of these cases, but you must assume that the finesse will fail when you make your original count. The decision to try the finesse must be based on an analysis of the best way to eliminate extra losers.

OTHER COMBINATIONS

In the example to the right, you could have three losers. But, if the missing cards are split 3-2 (68%) you only have two losers. And, if West has the missing ace, you might be able to finesse the King and Queen against the Ace to reduce the count to one loser. A conservative count is two losers.

2 LOSERS
K Q 8 3 SUPPORT HAND MASTER HAND 7 5 4 2

FAST AND SLOW LOSERS

There are two types of losers:

- **Fast Loser**

A fast loser is one that defenders can take as soon as they get the lead because they have the high cards in the suit.

- **Slow Loser**

A slow loser is one that defenders can eventually take but only if they can drive out your high cards in the suit.

If you have too many fast losers, your plan should avoid giving up the lead because opponents will be able to defeat the contract. If your losers are slow, you can plan to give up the lead because you will be able to regain the lead before opponents take too many tricks.

EXAMPLE — COUNTING LOSERS																			
<div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 2px; margin-bottom: 5px; text-align: left;">WEST - DECLARER</div> ♠ K Q T 8 7 4 ♥ A 6 ♦ A 2 ♣ K 4 3	<table style="width: 100%; border-collapse: collapse;"> <thead> <tr> <th style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 2px;">South</th> <th style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 2px;">West</th> <th style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 2px;">North</th> <th style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 2px;">East</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td style="padding: 2px;">5</td> <td style="padding: 2px;"></td> <td style="padding: 2px;">10</td> <td style="padding: 2px;"></td> </tr> <tr> <td style="padding: 2px;"></td> <td style="padding: 2px;">16</td> <td style="padding: 2px;"></td> <td style="padding: 2px;">9</td> </tr> <tr> <td colspan="4" style="padding: 2px;">Declaring: West-East</td> </tr> </tbody> </table>	South	West	North	East	5		10			16		9	Declaring: West-East				<div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 2px; margin-bottom: 5px; text-align: left;">EAST - DUMMY</div> ♠ A J 6 ♥ J 7 3 ♦ 9 6 4 3 ♣ Q J T	
South	West	North	East																
5		10																	
	16		9																
Declaring: West-East																			

Listen: North has 67% [$10/(10+5)=10/15$] and South has 33% of the missing HCP.

Pause: You have a nine-card spade fit so the *suit guideline* suggests a spade contract. You have 27 total bidding points (25 HCP + 2 ♠ LSP) so the *trump suit point guideline* suggests a game score contract. You can only afford to lose 3 tricks to make a spade game contract.

Pick Master: Declarer's hand (West) should be the master hand because it has the longest and strongest spade suit. The dummy hand (East) should be the supporting hand.

Look: You only have 3 West losers (0 ♠ + 1 slow ♥ + 1 slow ♦ + 1 fast ♣).

Analyze: There is no way to eliminate any of the losers.

Contract: You should be able to take ten tricks to make a spade game contract.

Play: When you gain the lead, you must play spades to draw all of the defenders' trump to prevent them from ruffing one of your winners. Then cash your winners to make the contract.

DRAWING TRUMP

As long as defenders have trump they have the potential to ruff one or more of your winners and defeat the contract. This means that as soon as possible you should usually continue to play the trump suit until your opponents are void in the suit. This is called *drawing trump*.

You definitely should draw trump:

- ✓ if you do not have any more losers than you can afford.
- ✓ if you plan to:
 - promote high cards in a side suit to create extra winners.
 - develop a side suit to create extra winners.

If you fail to draw trump and there is a bad distribution of the missing cards in the side suit, a defender may be able to ruff a trick and defeat the contract.

EXAMPLE — COUNTING LOSERS • DRAWING TRUMP							
WEST - DUMMY		North	East	South	West	EAST - DECLARER	
♠ K Q		6		9		♠ A 8	
♥ K J T 3 2		13		12		♥ Q 8 7 6	
♦ 9 4		Declaring: East-West				♦ J 7	
♣ K 8 6 4						♣ A Q 5 3 2	

Listen: South has 60% [$9/(9+6)=9/15$] and North has 40% of the missing HCP.

Pause: You have a nine-card heart fit and a nine-card club fit so the *suit guideline* suggests a suit contract in hearts because heart tricks score 30 each and club tricks only score 20 each. You have 28 total bidding points (25 HCP + 1 ♥ LSP + 1 ♠ SSP + 1 ♦ SSP) so the *trump suit point guideline* suggests a game score contract. You can only afford to lose 3 tricks to make a heart game contract.

Pick Master: The dummy hand (West) should be the master hand because it has the longest and strongest heart suit. The declarer hand should be the support hand.

Look: You have 4 West losers (0 ♠ + 1 fast ♥ + 2 fast ♦ + 1 slow ♣).

Analyze: You can expect to lose the three fast tricks. But the four missing clubs are probably split 3-1 (50%) or 2-2 (41%) so there is a 91% chance that your slow club loser will actually be a winner.

Contract: Odds strongly favor a try for a heart game contract to earn the game bonus.

Play: Because of the combined length of your club suit, you must draw trump before you attack the clubs. If you play the clubs first, one of the defenders will be able to ruff a club and defeat the contract.

RUFFING LOSERS

When you are playing a suit contract and you are void in the suit that was led, you can *ruff* the trick by playing a trump card. One way to eliminate a side suit loser in the master hand is to ruff the loser using a trump in the support hand.

Because you count the losers in the master hand, a ruff that uses a trump in the master hand does not eliminate any of the losers in that hand. This is illustrated in the example on the right. Assume that the trump suit is spades. The master hand, South, has one fast heart loser and three fast diamond losers. If opponents try to take tricks in hearts, you can ruff the second heart but that does not eliminate the fast heart loser. On the other hand, if you lose a diamond trick early, you can use the trump in the dummy to ruff two of the diamond losers.

RUFF 2 LOSERS	
♠ 8 4 3 2	
♥ 7 6 5 2	
♦ 5	
♣ Q 7 5 3	
SUPPORT HAND	
MASTER HAND	
♠ A K Q J T	
♥ 3	
♦ T 9 4	
♣ A K J 2	

Now you know why we only count *long suit points* in the master hand and only count *short suit points* in the supporting hand.

Ruffing by using trump in the master hand should only be used when you must:

- stop opponents from running their long suit
- gain entry into the master hand by leading a loser in the dummy

To successfully ruff side suit losers from the master hand by using trump in the supporting hand:

- ✓ the master hand must have more cards in the side suit with losers than the supporting hand.
- ✓ the support hand must have enough trump cards to ruff the losers.
- ✓ if there are two or more side suit losers, the master hand must have entries in other suits to gain entry to the hand to repeat the ruff.

Consider the following example. If spades are trump, the master hand, East, has one fast heart loser and three fast diamond losers. Because the support hand has as many diamonds as the master hand, there is no way to ruff any of the fast diamond losers.

CAN NOT RUFF LOSERS									
WEST - SUPPORT		North		East		South		West	
♠ 8 4 3		8				10			
♥ J 6 5				18				4	
♦ J 6 5				Declaring: East-West					
♣ Q 7 5 3									
EAST - MASTER									
♠ A K Q J T									
♥ 3									
♦ T 9 4									
♣ A K J 2									

Suppose that hearts are trump. All of the following examples satisfy the first two conditions for a successful ruff:

RUFF 1 CLUB	RUFF 2 CLUBS	LOSE 1 • RUFF 2 CLUBS
♥ 9 7 3 ♣ A 4 SUPPORT HAND MASTER HAND ♥ AKQJ 8 ♣ K 7 5	♥ 9 7 3 ♣ 4 SUPPORT HAND MASTER HAND ♥ AKQJ 8 ♣ A 6 2	♥ 9 7 3 ♣ 4 SUPPORT HAND MASTER HAND ♥ AKQJ 8 ♣ 8 7 5

In the example on the left you can cash the ♣A, lead low to the ♣K and then lead the losing club for a ruff in the support hand. There is always the possibility that one of your winners will be ruffed or that East will be able to overruff with the ♥T. But with the most likely club split being 5-3 (47%) or 4-4 (33%), the odds are in your favor. Since you only need one trump in the support hand, you could improve your odds by drawing two rounds of trump before playing the clubs.

In the middle example, you can cash the ♣A and lead one of the losing clubs for a ruff in the support hand. Now you can lead a heart to draw one round of trump and gain an entry back into the master hand. Then you can repeat the ruff. Once again, the odds are in your favor because the missing clubs should be split 5-4 (59%) or 6-3 (31%).

The right hand example is more complicated because:

- You must lose a club trick to setup the ruff. If you have too many fast losers, you may not be able to afford the loss.
- A smart defender will cash the club and then lead a heart to reduce your ruffing power. But, that will leave you with two hearts in the support hand.
- Because you need to preserve the trump in the support hand, you need an entry in another suit to get back to the master hand. If your only entry is in hearts, then you may not be able to repeat the ruff.

EXAMPLE — COUNTING LOSERS • RUFFING LOSERS							
WEST - DUMMY		East	South	West	North	EAST - DECLARER	
♠ A		12		12		♠ 9 6 5	
♥ K 8 5 3		9		7		♥ A Q J T 2	
♦ 8 7 6		Declaring: East-West				♦ A J 2	
♣ A J 9 6 5						♣ 7 2	

Listen: South has 56% [$9/(9+7)=9/16$] and North has 44% of the missing **HCP**.

Pause: You have a nine-card heart fit so the *suit guideline* suggests a heart contract. You have 28 total bidding points (24 **HCP** + 1 ♥ **LSP** + 3 ♠ **SSP**) so the *trump suit point guideline* suggests a game score contract. You can only afford to lose 3 tricks to make a heart game contract.

Pick Master: The declarer hand, East, should be the master hand because it has the longest and strongest heart suit. The dummy hand should be the support hand.

Look: You have 5 East losers (2 slow ♠ + 0 ♥ + 2 slow ♦ + 1 slow ♣).

Analyze: You can ruff (trump) the two slow spade losers in the dummy.

Contract: You should be able to take ten tricks to make a heart game contract.

Play: You must keep two trump in the dummy to ruff the losing spades. So, you may not be able to draw all of the trump immediately. But when you gain the lead, you can:

- ✓ cash the ♠A to void spades in the support hand
- ✓ lead a trump to draw trump and gain entry to the master hand
- ✓ lead a spade to ruff in the support hand
- ✓ lead a trump to draw trump and gain entry to the master hand
- ✓ lead a spade to ruff in the support hand
- ✓ finish drawing trump
- ✓ cash your winners

DISCARDING LOSERS

Sometimes you can eliminate a loser in the master hand by discarding it on an extra winner in the support hand. If the support hand does not have an extra winner, you may be able to develop one through promotion or by establishing a long suit. But care must be taken to ensure that defenders do not destroy your plan with a ruff.

Consider the example on the right where the trump suit is spades. The master hand, South, has three slow diamond losers and two fast club losers. But, the support hand has three extra heart winners. If you draw trump and play the hearts, you can discard the three slow diamond losers on the extra heart winners.

To discard losers from the master hand you must:

- ✓ have a side suit with more cards in the support hand than in the master hand
- ✓ have or must be able to develop extra winners in the support hand side suit
- ✓ ensure opponents can not ruff your plan

DISCARD 2 LOSERS
♠ 8 4 3 ♥ A K Q J ♦ 5 3 2 ♣ Q 6 3
SUPPORT HAND
MASTER HAND
♠ A K Q J T ♥ 3 ♦ A T 9 4 ♣ J T 2

DEFENDER PLAY

OPENING LEADS AGAINST SUIT CONTRACTS

The common opening leads against suit contracts are:

• **An attacking lead.**

An attacking lead is a lead from a suit with a strong sequence. You want to be sure that you can take your winners in a suit before declarer discards any losers in the suit. Unlike sequence leads in no trump, it is not necessary to have three cards in a leading sequence but you should have three cards to lead from an interior sequence.

- ✓ Sure tricks: A K 5; A K Q 7
- ✓ Top of a two or three card leading sequence: K Q J; Q J T 5; K Q 9 6; Q J 7 5
- ✓ Top of a three card or longer interior sequence: K J T 9; Q T 9 8

Leading the high card tells partner you have the next lower card in the suit.

• **If you have trump, a short suit lead.**

A short suit lead is most effective when the dummy is weak in the suit and bidding suggests your partner has some high card points. If you can void the suit, your partner might be able to gain the lead and return a card in your void suit to give you a ruff.

- ✓ Top of a spot doubleton: 9 6; 8 4
- ✓ A singleton: A; J; 4;

Leading a relatively high spot card tells partner you may have a worthless doubleton. When you play the lower card the next time the suit is lead, you tell your partner that it really was a doubleton.

• **A passive lead.**

The best passive leads are:

- ✓ Fourth highest in a long suit: K T 4 3 2; Q 9 6 5
- ✓ Low from three to an honor: K 7 3; Q 8 5

• **A trump.**

If the dummy has a short side suit and cards in the trump suit, leading a trump card reduces declarer's chances of ruffing master hand losers in that suit.

Opening Lead Exceptions

Do not underlead an Ace in a suit contract!
 Save your Ace to beat the King.
 If you must lead from a suit with an Ace, lead the Ace.

Leading the top from a Ax, Kx, Qx, or Jx doubleton is usually dangerous!

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Example 1: You have connecting honors in dummy's weak suit. Lead the ♣K to attack the ♣A, tell your partner that you have the ♣Q, and promote the Queen into a winner. Your partner has 8 HCP so it is possible that partner has the ♣A which could give your partnership three club tricks.

Example 2: You have three trump and the dummy has weak spades. Lead the ♠9, top of the doubleton. You partner has 10 HCP and may be able to take two spade tricks and lead a third spade to give you a ruff. The lead from the short suit is better than a passive lead from hearts which would increase the value of dummy's ♥Q or a passive lead from clubs which would increase the value of dummy's ♣J.